

**Aesthetics at Work:
Using Principles of Art and Beauty to Improve Work Engagement**

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For Ryan, for his love and support and willingness to watch the baby while I did my homework

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PROLOGUE

I recall sitting at my cubicle, watching an instructional video on my computer. The white noise that was piped into the building through the vents overhead made it difficult to hear the instructor on the screen, so I put my headphones on and listened through the computer. The instructor smiled and welcomed me to the company. She congratulated me for joining a dynamic and exciting organization.

I looked around. My office walls were beige, the same color as the carpeting; and the desktop was a similar color. My office was located in the middle of 200 identical offices, in the center of a warehouse-style building. Fluorescent lights shone down on us from the ceiling high above.

The video ended, concluding my official new-employee orientation program at the company. As far as Human Resources was concerned, I had been trained.

My experience at this company, and at several organizations since then, has inspired the critical questions in the following research paper. As scenarios like the one above repeated themselves throughout my career, I wondered why so many work environments were sterilized of personality. I questioned why training and development programs were aimed at improving only my functional skills. I despaired as my unique abilities as a creative thinker, and my artistic skills and interests, were disregarded.

These experiences made me ask...What if Human Resource Development (HRD) programs could address *all* of my abilities, skills and interests? What if my ability to appreciate beauty in my environment actually helped my work engagement, and my on-the-job development? Would it be possible to improve work engagement through

artistic, or art-inspired training and development?

As an HRD professional, I have sought to create and implement training and development programs that connect to the “whole person” at work. The following research paper is equally inspired by my personal experiences in development programs, as well as the HRD programs I now design and implement.

Chapter 1:

INTRODUCTION

Aesthetic matters are fundamental for the harmonious development of both society and the individual.

~Friedrich Schiller

People are emotional, spiritual, creative, and dynamic creatures, possessing both sensuous as well as intellectual powers. A person is able to write a song, or a poem, that is both intellectually complex and emotionally beautiful. Yet we spend most of our careers working in environments structured to value only our logical, rational abilities. Organizations around the world proclaim their people to be their greatest asset, yet only support functional, productive behaviors of employees. And while employers acknowledge that people are creative, innovative, and artistic, these qualities seem secondary when it comes to work performance, success, and ultimately, growth.

Human Resources Development or HRD is a field responsible for achieving organizational success through people. HR professionals carry the important responsibility of supporting both business and people needs, mediating between them to maintain a balance of a healthy organization and happy employees. HRD has an opportunity to improve this relationship. Human resources would achieve greater success if engagement and development programs were designed to support employees' appreciation of aesthetics—or pleasure through physical perceptions of beauty. By expanding their mission to include artistic appreciation, HRD practitioners may build

environments supporting employees' contemporary expectations, nurturing the "whole person," improving the relationship between employee and employer, and thereby improving people's engagement in their work. An individual's connections to beauty in the environment, or nature, "holds the key to our aesthetic, intellectual, cognitive and even spiritual satisfaction" (E. O. Wilson, as cited in Jenkins, 2009, p. 15).

Corporations have historically looked to HR to engage employees in development programs aimed at manipulating employees to adapt to organizational change, or to at least minimize resistance to it. Fields like HRD and organizational design (OD) share this implicit purpose of coercing employees to behave in ways that further organizational interests. Functionality and productivity are paramount, and investment of resources toward other goals is deemed unessential. Yet the utilitarian models of personnel management no longer serve the needs of a younger, possibly more creative, and definitely more independent and transient work force. Today's employees are more apt to expect their work to be meaningful, rewarding, pleasurable, and engaging on an emotional and artistic level. The answer to this challenge lies in the incorporation of aesthetics in HRD.

The integration of aesthetics into human resources development allows for new insights into both areas. It expands training and development practices to include creativity and imagination in adult learning. It legitimizes the need for artistic appreciation in training and development, making a "business case for the beautiful." The aesthetic approach may be threaded throughout any of the practices under the umbrella of HRD—individual training, leadership development, skills training, consulting/coaching, and succession management. The resulting interplay modernizes the practices of HRD, ensuring the field meets contemporary expectations. Aesthetics

supports the need for HRD to go beyond functionality and beyond “cogs in the machine” input/output, in order to attract, engage and retain creative people.

Linking HRD with aesthetics brings a new approach to the branch of philosophy dealing with the creation and appreciation of beauty. An individual’s awareness of beauty does not shut down when he or she is engaged in work activities, and therefore it is important to study the sensory influences on the individual at work. Aesthetics in the workplace allows for an enriched conversation about the work environment, beyond the functional requirements of safety and productivity. It asks us to consider that which has been a primarily utilitarian and functional part of our lives to be conceptualized through new ideas, concepts and practices in a richer way.

Associating aesthetics with HDR invites an interesting friction between the fields, as the independent disciplines maintain distinct goals. As will be discussed in further detail, HRD is responsible for training employees to ensure they are sufficiently skilled to be successful in their roles at work, and the inclusion of aesthetics into training may be seen as incidental to this goal. This interdisciplinarity enriches HRD applications, but also teases out opposing objectives: Is learning for practical applications or for emotional and spiritual enrichment? Could this combination compromise the practical need for both? For example, does the promotion of aesthetics get in the way of practical needs like learning-transfer? I will argue that both fields contain similar objectives and their combination does not actually work to the detriment of each individual entity.

This thesis paper challenges the effectiveness of a narrow, skills-based, transactional, quantitative approach to the design of employee engagement programs. My research instead conceptualizes HRD functionality through the application of aesthetics with a goal of enabling organizations to find common ground with their

people, and become social organizations appreciative of the whole person at work. My research validates the use of imagination and creativity in employee development, and argues against the perspective of aesthetics as just a pleasant diversion from workplace productivity. It addresses the questions: How does the use of aesthetics in HRD and OD improve the psychological contract between employee and employer? In what ways does the heuristic action of aesthetics—feeling through physical perceptions of beauty (Linstead, 2000)—affect employee engagement at work? Broadly speaking, my research aim is to identify connections between truth—the functional, quantitative goals of HRD—and beauty.

There is no universally accepted framework connecting aesthetics with HRD, but Stephen Gibb's (2004) theoretical model provides abundant opportunities to make connections between aesthetic concepts, language, and philosophy and employee engagement and development programs. I therefore decided to use Gibb's framework throughout this study, and also revisited empirical research on what is considered "good" HRD. I looked at a variety of interdisciplinary fields, including practitioners' application of employee development/training, adult learning, organizational development and change management. By applying aesthetic theories, processes and modes of analysis to the organizational setting, I was able to explore changes in HRD and OD practices in an effort to improve employee engagement through art, emotion, beauty, meaningfulness, creativity, and imagination.

To begin, I will briefly introduce HRD, including general practices, definitions and core beliefs. Language and terms will be clarified for purposes of this research paper. I will then consider what I believe is a disconnect between the design and delivery of human resource programs—designed to be functional, fast and inexpensive—against

the expectations and desires of contemporary workers. Aesthetics will be defined, and I will make a “business case for the beautiful”—that imagination, creativity, beauty and an appreciation of aesthetics should be integrated into HRD design, because this appeals to the whole person.

Chapter 2:

CURRENT HRD PRACTICES AND THE LINK TO AESTHETICS

Human Resources Development is both a field of study and a profession. It consists of two overarching ideas: personal training and development, and organizational development. The former refers to the advancement of a person's expertise for the purpose of improving that person's on-the-job performance, and the latter the ability of the organization to make the most of its "human resource capital," or employees. It is important to emphasize that the purpose of development for a person, in a work context and from the perspective of Human Resources, is to improve *performance*.

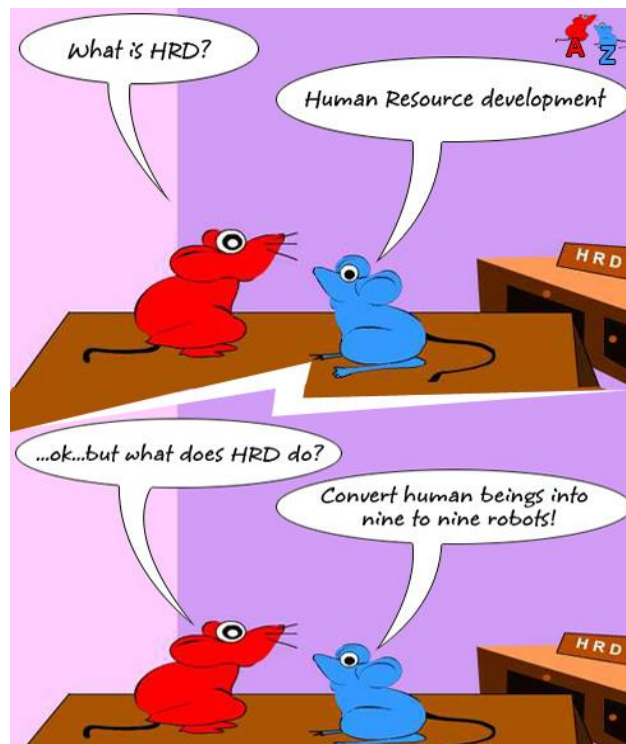


Figure 1: Photo retrieved from Pegomag.com

This study concerns an application of aesthetics and engagement on the individual worker, with emphasis on individual development. I will therefore utilize language that represents the individual's perspective. Terms such as "social capital," "knowledge/learning economy," and even "talent" are common in the profession and in study of HRD, and I will use them in this paper. However, it is not my intention to address aesthetics in large-scale efforts to improve engagement or performance. My focus is on the *individual at work* and therefore the language should be understood from this perspective.

HRD has a complex interdisciplinary base which naturally creates confusion around the field. HRD encompasses adult learning in the workplace, as well as "training and development, organization development and change, organizational learning, knowledge management, management development, coaching, performance management, competence development and strategic HRD" (Harrison and Kessels, 2003, p. 84). General practices of HRD include individual training, leadership development, skills training, and other areas which have close ties to adult education, consulting/coaching, and succession management. From an organizational perspective, the lines begin to blur between HRD and OD. Organizational development, change management, and organizational alignment could just as easily be understood as OD or HRD. Regardless of the field claiming ownership to these practices, it is helpful to understand their inclusion in the pursuit of a healthy learning environment.

There is a multidisciplinary nature to the field of HRD, which makes a general definition difficult to agree upon. If individual learning and organizational growth are the two core foundational tenets of HRD, also implied in the definition is

- An understanding that organizations may be improved through learning

and development activities of its workers; and

- Organizations possess a commitment to people and human potential, and may even assume a “desire to see people grow as individuals and a passion for learning” (Swanson and Holton, 2001, p. 145-146).

What is notable about textbook definitions of HRD is the clarification that the development of people via the advancement of knowledge, skills and/or competencies is for the purpose of improving performance *within an organization* (Gilley, J. W., Eggland, S. A., Gilley A. M., 2002). The overall agenda of human betterment is caged within a context of organizational enhancement.

There is a belief among practitioners that the best HRD possible is simply excellence in systems, human sciences, research, theory, and functionality. It is about making things work well, as quickly as possible, using the least amount of resources. “Good” HRD may therefore take form as repeatable and measurable skill training, linear career development, documented performance management, or coaching and mentoring programs. This is a realistic expectation, as organizations strive to organize their employees to enable ideal performance. However, whereas good HRD has historically implied functional systems, key to what is now believed to be the best HRD possible is a personal element of imagination and creativity (Gibb, 2004). Imagination is the incorporation of memory, perception, emotion and metaphor; of “holding onto these images in the head for personal interpretation,” says Gibb, (p. 57). Therefore, inclusion of imagination and creativity in training and development does not detract from the functional goals of HRD.

Successfully enabling people to work towards their best performance creates an accumulated stock of internal knowledge, abilities and skills for the organization.

Organizations generally claim ownership of their human resource base because it contains knowledge possessed by the organization's employees, of which the firm has "built up over time into an identifiable expertise" (Kamoche, 1996, p. 216). If the organization has made the investment to improve employees' technical skills, for example, those skills may be translated into organizational capabilities. Resources are converted into final products or services (Amit and Schoemaker, 1993, p. 35), and in this way employees are again valued by their ability to function as "cogs in the machine" of the organization.

Of course, this approach is distinctly one-sided, weighted in favor of the organization that may unfortunately support HRD only in its ability to "exploit opportunities and reduce threats" (Barney, 1991, p. 99). There is a clear disconnect here between the functional goal of HRD for the organization, and the personal goals of individual workers, which include a need to connect to work, to own and engage in work, to find meaning and ultimately find purpose in their work (Thorpe, 1998). Functionality and systems theory may be widely acknowledged in this approach, but imagination, creativity, and aesthetics are not (Gibb, 2004).

These points will be explored in greater detail later, to underscore the need for HRD to expand its functions to fulfill the holistic needs of its people through the incorporation of aesthetics. Fortunately for individual workers, the interdisciplinarity of HRD means that it is a field in constant change, evolving in both theory and practice. "HRD is in a state of becoming," says Lee (2001), evolving into two distinctive agendas: human betterment and organizational enhancement. A third area of HRD, that of *societal* development may find itself an equal partner as the field continues to change to accommodate the independent, transient, mobile, telecommuting workforce.

What are aesthetics?

Aesthetics is a branch of philosophy addressing factors that give, or are designed to give pleasure through beauty (Beardsley, 1996). According to Gibb (2004), the introduction of aesthetics in HRD is to “seek to legitimize the concern with imagination and creativity across the continuum of aesthetic concerns, from the narrow concern with beauty to the broadest concern with the simultaneous engagement of mind, body and sensibility” (p. 69). Allowing for this connection to beauty also invites a more holistic engagement in work. Therefore it is the organization’s responsibility to acknowledge that aesthetics shape and inform the work environment. Among other things, the work environment, after all, is “intended to satisfy and please rather than offend and disgust” (Gibb, p. 70).

Why study the application of aesthetics to HRD? Because today’s employees expect more from their employers, and savvy employers recognize the need to meet these new standards. They realize that HRD must reach beyond functionality and beyond “cogs in the machine” input/output, in order to attract, engage and retain employees. Organizations should ensure that their HRD processes acknowledge and incorporate individuals’ imagination and creativity, and to support the inclusion of these. Development of individuals is a crucial area for beauty to be conceptualized and trawled for new ideas, concepts, and practices that benefit the business. This is a stretch for most organizations and HRD teams. Incorporating creativity and imagination into their training and development programs requires them to explain this change to their stakeholders, and in so doing, make a business case for the beautiful.

Human resource professionals have long struggled to legitimize their “seat at the

table” with management as they aim to ensure their organization’s talent strategy matches its business strategy. This struggle may be due to the roots of human resources in the transactional, traditional mindset of “personnel,” or perhaps it is because development of people is considered of secondary importance to the *acquisition* of talented people. It may be because personnel were typically female employees, while management was male. Regardless, today’s businesses demand economic success, and successful organizations understand that investing in talent is key to the life of the business. It is in their best interest to support productive HR leaders by including them as stakeholders in their top management teams. HR professionals should in turn support business leaders with interventions that are utilitarian and scientific, offering processes that match the business’s strategy, with critical and consultative initiatives. In short, HR’s first responsibility is to ensure that an organization’s people strategy matches its business strategy.

Good HRD must include a concern for the imagination and creativity alongside excellence in “functional” systems. A mentoring program, for example, may be just as structured but also more successful if it encouraged the partnership to attend a performing arts show, or work on a creative project together. Allowing employees to connect with their individual perception of beauty expands their ability to engage in their work with mind, body and spirit (Thorpe, 1998 and Gibb, 2004). Ultimately the inclusion of aesthetics will make for more successful HRD initiatives.

Before I address the ways in which HRD systems may incorporate aesthetics, I will first acknowledge the differing goals of individual development and organizational development. In the following chapter, I will discuss the ways in which businesses invest in the training and development of their employees to capitalize on their “talent,” and

the effect this has on the psychological contract. This conflict further emphasizes the need for organizations to improve their training and development initiatives through the incorporation of aesthetics.

Chapter 3:

ID vs. OD

The two major areas of HRD—individual development and organizational development—serve distinct purposes and are at times dichotomous. Is the overall purpose of HRD programs to support the self-interest of individuals? Or is the purpose to ensure that individuals cooperate for greater organizational gain? There is a “rub” here of belief vs. resistance from the individual’s perspective, and a conflict between two separate objectives: individual benefit or organizational benefit. In light of textbook definitions of OD emphasizing “reduction of resistance” we see organizational HRD dominated by *opportunism* (Harrison and Kessels, 2003) and people as means to organizational success. Ghoshal and Bartlett (1994) state that when organizational conflict is pervasive, “incentives and fiat are viewed as the key mechanisms for achieving cooperation” (p. 109).

This opinion is contested by several researchers who maintain that managers who have “emphasized discipline, stretch, trust and support were critical in explaining high levels of individual initiative, mutual cooperation and collective learning across the whole workforce” (Harrison and Kessels, p 34; Ghoshal and Bartlet, 1994). Yet even if employee’s assumption is longer “me vs. them” or one-sided relationship benefiting the organization, the conflict still exists in the workplace. Employees may suspect that support from management is nothing personal; it is directed merely at organizational success. Research on HRD suggests simple fixes to address these issues. For example, thorough and extensive new employee training to ensure these individuals are comfortable and successful in their new jobs, would be an obvious benefit to both new

associates and organizations. It theoretically supports both sides' needs. However, these simple, procedural and structured HRD processes do not remedy larger belief vs. resistance challenges. HRD has the ability to ease the fears of individual employees by creating learning initiatives that connect to the whole person, to the emotional, creative, spirit of associates, to benefit the person and the larger organization. If HRD addresses whole-person development, it may inch closer to a mutually beneficial relationship.

Gilley, Eggland and Gilley (2002) assert that individual development is at the heart of OD. Individual development (training) and organizational development (OD), when used interchangeably, assumes that individual development is basically a micro perspective of the organization (2002). Simply add up the development of individuals and presto!, organizational development is achieved. This assumption is understandable—the different philosophies are actually oriented towards the same goals and objectives, and oversimplification may be inevitable. If each employee is engaged in activities that enable his or her improved performance on the job, those same activities may add up on the macro level and lead to organizational improvement. Gilley et al. argues that individual development is “at the heart of OD,” as each employee contributes to the overall efficiency of the organization through gained skills. Personal growth leads to organizational growth.

The objectives of individual development and organizational development are parallel. For example, an individual developing a personal competency, say “managing complexity,” may improve in her ability to make sense of complex, possibly contradictory information to effectively solve problems (Korn/Ferry 2014). These improvements may cut down on the time and resources it takes her and her team to meet their objectives, which ultimately impacts the company's bottom line. Translated

to a larger scale, many individuals in an organization who are developing competencies that are important to themselves personally *and* their organization, achieve beneficial change for both.

Herein lies a radical concept that has the potential to make an idyllic connection between ID and OD, which is the desire of the individual to be developed *for* the organization's gain, and the responsibility of the organization to exist for the benefit of its people. Neither concept is completely realistic in practice, considering the progression of contemporary workers towards self-employment and the global "talent pool" from which companies may hire.

Returning to the assertion that individuals are at the heart of organizational development, I accept that change on the individual level is a foundation for wider organizational change, and therefore it is imperative that individuals "buy into" organizational goals and strategies. Researchers on human resource development assert that people must understand and agree with organizational strategies and understand the relationship between their personal development and wider organizational change initiatives to be engaged with their work (Gilley, Eggland and Gilley; Harter, J. K., Schmidt, F. L., & Hayes, T. L). Engagement or "buy in" occurs when employees believe in the importance of the company's mission, understand their role in its implementation, and trust the individuals who are leading and implementing the program. HR managers are encouraged to communicate opportunities for individuals' career development, which is a theoretical way to link micro and macro perspectives of OD (organizational efficiency viewed from individual or micro perspective, and talent development theorized to enhance the organizational or macro perspective). Gilley et al. even defines career development as a planned effort comprised of structured "activities

or processes that result in a mutual career plotting effort between employees and the organization” (2002), assuming that both parties actually believe that their investment is being done for the other party. Practically speaking, however, this is not the case: the organization is investing to capitalize on its talent, and the individual is investing in the organization for personal incentives (career growth, remuneration, benefits, etc.).

Psychological contract

The psychological contract between employee and employer is the assumed and mutually agreed-upon unwritten understanding between an employer and an employee. Rousseau (2000) expands the definition to include the holistic idea of “belief systems” of individual workers and employees regarding their mutual obligations (p. 1). Unlike a formal written contract of employment, the psychological contract sets the dynamics for this relationship, and represents the mutual beliefs, perceptions and informal obligations between the “parties” (Rousseau, 1989). Breaches in the psychological contract tend to occur when employees “perceive their firm, or its agents, have failed to deliver on what they perceive was promised, or vice versa” says Rousseau (1989, p. 121). People may respond with reduced loyalty, lower morale and poor job performance which can lead to termination.

The problem with the psychological contract is that organizations today are less likely to promise the traditional career path, job security, benefits, compensation, etc. more commonly found a generation ago. Even if there were a mutual understanding of the agreement at the onset of the relationship, changing factors on both sides can lead to a breakdown of trust. A new hire may find himself disappointed in the behavior of his new boss, and may choose to leave the job after just a few weeks, without worrying if the

decision would negatively impact his résumé. Individuals may be less interested in personal investment in the organization and more self-interested.

Therefore, if individual development and organization development are parallel philosophies coincidentally sharing the same goals and objectives, textbook instructions for bridging the gap are inadequate, antiquated and unrealistic. If psychological contracts are breaking down, what are both parties to do? How are organizations going to change to attract, retain and develop the best people for their interests?

Aesthetics is the answer!

Aesthetics in HRD serve both the individuals' and the organizations' contemporary expectations. It represents the missing link between the needs of the organization to engage workers, and the need of individuals to be valued as whole persons.

The study of aesthetics in work life and the concern for understanding the principles of aesthetic influence is far from novel. The early Romans, for example, valued the importance of the aesthetic principle “unity in variety” (Bosanquet, 1892). In psychology, some of the earliest experiments focused on aesthetics (Fechner, 1997), and mathematical approaches to aesthetics date back to ancient times (Nasar, 1992, p. xxi). In the late 19th century, the core principle of Gestalt psychology emerged from Berlin, Germany, and stated essentially that the brain is holistic, and that individuals observe objects in their entirety before perceiving their individual parts. The whole, in other words, is greater than the sum of its parts (Goldstone, 1998). Generally, this theory asserts that perception is the product of complex interactions among various stimuli (Humphrey, 1924).

In the latter part of the 20th century, empirical aesthetics and environmental psychology merged to form the field of environmental aesthetics. Empirical aesthetics was concerned with the arts, while environmental psychology as an applied field was concerned with improving the human surroundings (Nasar, 2002). Both areas used scientific methodologies to address the human response to environmental stimuli. The past fifty years have seen resurgence in the empirical research of aesthetics in the area of environmental design. In 1976 J. Wohlwill expanded the accepted definition of aesthetics at work, to include environmental influences on the *full range* of human effect (Wohlwill, 1976).

The aesthetic approach to organization studies is based on the assumption that an organization itself is not exclusively cognitive, driven by the mental processes and outputs of its workers. Instead it is a simultaneously social and collective construct (Berger & Luckman, 1966; Knorr-Cetina, 1981; Shutz, 1962-66) and it derives from the knowledge-creating faculties of human senses (Strati, 2000). A significant consequence of this assumption is that personal interpretations and idiosyncrasies derived from these knowledge-creating faculties, including personal and organizational values and symbols, create a unique and personalized association between organizational environment and aesthetics (Strati, 2000). Interpretations of and reactions to aesthetic factors vary according to personal opinion. What is beautiful and meaningful to one person could seem ugly, offensive or inconsequential in another person.

The introduction of aesthetics into the field of HRD may at first seem arbitrary, and a filter that is more subjective than clarifying. This is especially true with regard to the interdisciplinarity within the field of HRD and the ongoing debates about how to define HRD as a discipline. What is perceived as beautiful is an individual perception,

after all, and so how might an organization cater to personal tastes? Aesthetics, however, actually allows for clarification of the domain of HRD.

Aesthetics in HRD presents opportunities to consider new and innovative ideas in the field. Smith (1997) asserts that the history of science and philosophy have shown that “intellectual polarization” creates a dynamic that drives innovation in any discipline, from humanities to science. Smith describes a “tendency for an array of multiple, variously differing, more or less shifting, configurations of belief to move towards and become stabilized as contradistinctive and mutually antagonistic positions” (Smith, 1997, p. xxv). She states that two strong positions create interplay between “realists” and “constructivists,” which will energize a domain and lead to new innovations. According to Smith, realists believe in and take comfort in structure as it exists, and they hold to “established ideas about true, knowledge, meaning, reason, objectivity, and justification” (Smith, 1997, p. 53). Alternatively, the constructivist approach is likely to challenge these concepts and seek to provide insights to new ways of thinking. Gibb (2004) applies constructivist thinking to HRD and argues that the approach helps escape the rigid frames of mind inherited from past eras, including the structure of individual and organizational experiences, relationships and functions. However, the constructivist concept does not exclude nor diminish the need for organized and functional processes in HRD. Rather, it is the interplay between the approaches that allows for “good” HRD to exist to support the creating and sharing of knowledge in a knowledge economy. HRD, when viewed through the constructivist conception allows for new ways to synthesize changing concerns, social contexts, new systems, etc. to incorporate imagination and creativity (Gibb, 2004).

What would this look like in HRD programs? In the following chapter, I will

consider the ways in which adult learning at work may be improved through the application of aesthetic principles. I will discuss how imagination-based approaches to learning supports creative teaching methods in training and development programs, as well as Gestalt, holistic learning and applications of learning.

Chapter 4:

AESTHETICS AND ADULT LEARNING

As previously discussed, HRD encompasses adult learning in the organizational setting, for purposes of employee development. Individuals may participate in an HRD program to gain new skills or deepen their existing knowledge about a subject. It is the responsibility of educators, or “trainers’ in the work context, to free the minds of learners in order to enable them to imagine new connections. This idea is explored in detail by Takaya (2007) who argues that an educated person must be an imaginative person, to go from *knowledgeable* to truly *educated*. Imagination is the power of the mind to “generate images by associating and dissociating ideas or impressions,” productively creating new connections (Takaya, 2007, p. 24). Critical thinking, on the other hand, is defined by the National Council for Excellence in Critical Thinking (1987) as the “process of actively and skillfully conceptualizing, applying, analyzing, synthesizing, and/or evaluating information gathered from, or generated by, observation, experience, reflection, reasoning, or communication, as a guide to belief and action” (Scriven, 1987). Therefore critical thinking and imagination go hand-in-hand when achieving new connections. Trainers building a learning culture, or knowledge economy, should consequently aim to inspire imagination and creativity in learners.

The imagination-based approach to learning has an important role in the way people learn on the job. Egan, Stout and Takaya (2007) support this assertion with two theories:

- That such educational values as understanding with breadth and depth,

rationality, and morality by definition require imaginative capacity; and

- One cannot become imaginative without knowledge or skill, which are acquired through experiences that include instructional processes. (Egan, et. al, 2007, p. 21)

This correlates with Smith's realist vs. constructivist theory, because the need for functionality is not overruled by imagination or creativity. Rather, imagination and creativity are required to "provide insights, open up new ways of thinking, and escape existing limiting frames of mind" (Gibb, 2004, p. 54).

Training and development programs in the work context have historically been anchored in behaviorist psychological theory, which links psychology of "self" to the economy, and emphasizes a system of rewards and reinforcements grounded in stimulus/response conditioning. Within this system of expectations, behaviors, and rewards, individual behavior and achievement in the workplace took their signal from the organization's behavior, achievement, performance, goals and rewards. This cyclical relationship thus encouraged HRD practitioners to design training and development programs to give individuals extrinsic rewards. Complete a certification course, for example, and receive an increase in compensation. These motivators supported learning environments that allowed for fast, convenient, and inexpensive knowledge-transfer. One-way downloads of information lessened the requirement of learners to make their own connections, thereby eliminating the need for use of the imagination. It worked fine up to a point, but this approach did not address the "whole person" at work.

Fortunately, contemporary organizational learning programs generally push back against this teacher-led, behaviorist model of adult learning and individual

development. As organizations recognize the need to develop their talent in order to stay competitive in the marketplace, today's practitioners are more apt to emphasize learner-led material mastery and expertise, as well as holistic adult learning programs.

Autonomous, self-directed, self-actualized learning systems, modalities, processes and rewards have replaced instructor-led, one-way transfers of information.

A Gestalt approach to teaching and facilitation is student-centered, meaning that students are ultimately responsible for their learning. It argues that people learn more when they have an ownership in and control of the learning experience, as described here by John Heron: "It is constituted by understanding and skill, retention and practice, interest and commitment...all necessarily self-generated: no-one else can do your understanding or retention or practice for you" (Heron, 1993, p. 14).

The Gestalt approach to employee development allows for a more holistic application of learning. Whereas behaviorist theory of employee development focuses on external rewards, Gestaltist training includes all sensory factors in the environment. Carl Rogers exemplified this approach when he said "I know I cannot teach anyone anything, I can only provide an environment in which he can learn" (Burns, 1983).

Contemporary applications of the psychology of HRD (PHRD) have also supported applications of Cognitive Theory in training. In applications of Cognitive Theory, specifically with regard to Constructivism, adult learning is focused on the individual and how each person makes meaning out of experiences, as well as how they are influenced by external forces (Glaserfeld, 1989). Gestalt theory puts learning and development at the center of work life, and tells us that "living, growing and learning are inseparable" (Perls, Hefferline, and Goodman, 1951, book two). Cognitive theory is concerned with a person's thought processes; how he or she thinks, remembers,

analyzes, and interprets information. The combination of these theories is supported by Takaya's 2007 research on imagination. I argue that cognitive theory supports imagination by holding images in the head, making connections to these thoughts from memory, perception, emotion and imported metaphor. Designing training and development programs to include both Gestalt and Cognitive theories is important for practitioners to address the learner as a whole, including the learner's personal interpretations of information.

In the following chapter, I will organize the interaction and interplay between HRD and aesthetics using Stephen Gibb's 2004 framework which captures both the realistic framework of HRD, as well as the more flexible concepts of art and beauty, and holistic engagement.

Chapter 5:

CONNECTING AESTHETICS TO HRD

There is no formal framework to capture all of the potential connections between the fields of aesthetics and Human Resources Development, but Stephen Gibb suggests a matrix that organizes applications of HRD, and captures the functional requirements of HRD, and incorporates imagination and creativity. He created this framework to show the various conceptions of HRD including aesthetic concerns (Gibb, 2004, p. 60):



Quadrant 1: Design in HRD—Importing Metaphors

As previously defined, aesthetics are principally concerned with the nature and appreciation of beauty. I have argued that the best HRD includes adult learning that is both student-centered (Gestaltist, Cognitive) and holistic (incorporating creativity and imagination). Gibb’s first quadrant introduces and also “masks” aesthetics in HDR, reflecting how the “host” exports meaning through metaphors. These metaphor-exporting hosts might include architecture, fashion, poetry, or interior design. The disciplines *themselves* communicate concepts of beauty.

Architecture is a practice with numerous connections to aesthetics. It is a metaphor-exporting discipline, inasmuch as works of construction are often considered objects of art. However, the structure of architecture directly influences adult learning through both language and the learning environment. Applications of architectural aesthetics in adult learning lead to a discussion of “the creation of learning spaces using appropriate materials and structure that are useful, and when artfully done, even beautiful” (Bredeson, 2003, p. 153).

Design of the learning space: Physical environment

Writing about the influence of aesthetics in the workplace, George Cairns argues that aesthetics are important in *any* environment because of the values and expressions that the physical environment can embody and represent (2002). The aesthetic quality of the environment is important to communities of people, as evidenced when neighbors organize a neighborhood cleanup campaign, or when an artist displays her sculpture in a public park. Empirical data substantiate this evidence, including Cantor’s 1969 study which found that pleasantness (an aesthetic factor) was the dominant response in critiquing environmental quality (Cantor, 1969). Various studies that address the importance of visual quality of the surrounding environment include Lowenthal and Riel (1972), Harrison and Sarre (1975), and Russell and Ward (1981).

However, special consideration must be given to the *work* environment in particular due to the increasing permeability between work and family life. According to the US of Labor Statistics, Americans spend on average 8.8 hours per day on work and work related activities (American Time Use Survey, 2011). Because this represents approximately 1/3 of the 24-hour day and over half of typical waking hours, it is

important to question the impact and importance of aesthetics on work environment and therefore to workplace well-being.

What is the purpose of the work environment? Contradictory assessments of the meaning of the workplace exist in both scholarly literature and business publications. Some researchers argue that the work environment should be empowering (Turner & Meyerson, 1998) while others propose that it is meant to provide structure and control (Baldry, Bain, & Taylor, 1998). They generally agree, however, that the workplace should encourage healthy, productive and engaged workers.

How does employee engagement and productivity change when comfort, ease, friendliness and beauty of environment are prioritized? Understanding how the workplace and environmental aesthetics affect workers may help organizational development professionals and workplace design engineers create environments that promote improved well-being. Furthermore, employees who connect with their environment on an aesthetic level may feel more connected to their work, their jobs and their employers.

Industrial psychologists understand the detrimental effect of an unhealthy work environment. People who work in these environments may experience such symptoms as workplace stress, lower output, and burnout. Organizations like the American Association of Critical-Care Nurses (AACN) recognize the inextricable links between the quality of the work environment, excellent nursing care, and patient care outcomes. Therefore businesses like the AACN set a high standard for establishing and sustaining healthy work environments (American Association, 2005).

By contrast, some assert that the work environment should be intentionally designed for hard work rather than comfort. Stephen Francis, former Head Coach of the

Jamaican Olympic sprinting team, argued that a performance environment should exclude any factors that would provide comfort. Francis designed a Spartan-inspired environment to push his sprinters to their best performance. He argued that an environment lacking in comfort helped him identify key qualities in his runners. If his sprinters trained in comfortable environments, surrounded by their awards and medals, the “winning qualities” he wanted to see in each athlete might not be apparent (Andersen, 2012). Sometimes work environments (for example, manufacturing assembly lines or construction) are also designed for hard work and productivity rather than comfort.

Case Studies in Environmental Aesthetics

George Cairns’ 2002 research analyzed several physical and social workplace designs to compare the different aspects, theories, and positions regarding aesthetics in the workplace. Cairns’ paper presented and discussed contrasting theories on workplace design. From both a physical and social perspective, the study reviewed how workplace and its aesthetics affect people; the findings can help designers create environments that promote well-being.

Much research has explored the effects of lighting, sound, temperature and other physical elements on employee engagement and wellness. Veitch, Newsham, Boyce and Jones developed a conceptual model in which lighting appraisal and visual capabilities predicted aesthetic judgments, mood and performance (2008). This study, published in the journal *Lighting Research & Technology*, used structural equation modeling to demonstrate a strong fit to a model in which lighting appraisals influenced work engagement through aesthetic judgments and mood. Essentially, people who appraised

their lighting as good also appraised the room as more attractive, were in a better mood, more satisfied with the environment, and more engaged in their work. Their research concluded that an aesthetically-pleasing work environment (from a lighting perspective) could contribute to employee effectiveness (Veitch et al., 2008).

Empirical studies (Kasmar, Griffin & Mauritzen, 1968; Samuelson & Lindauer, 1976) introduce effects of variations in aesthetic conditions on well-being and behavior (Nasar, 1991). Samuelson and Lindauer's research used a model called the Kasmar Environmental Description Scales to study perception and performance in either a neat or messy room, by high and low sensation seekers. They found that the rooms were described differently according to participant's personality (Samuelson & Lindauer, 1976).

Other studies address a person's positive or negative emotional state, or "affect," and link these states to physical elements in the physical work environment. Baron and Thomley's (1991) research proposed that positive affect induced by fragrance favorably influenced social behavior and task performance (Baron & Thomley, 1994). According to one study, variations in fluorescent lamp type and light level may induce positive affect and influence task performance and prosocial behavior (Baron et al., 1992). Other visual factors, such as room color, window placement, natural vs. synthetic lighting, art on display, and physical proximity to coworkers, have each been studied as influencers of employee engagement and wellness.

As a personal characteristic, aesthetic appreciation and response may correlate with positive or negative affectivity, because either may be the consequence of physical or psychological conditions of the workplace according to each person's individual reactions. Another personal characteristic, which may be acknowledged and isolated, is

intrinsic/extrinsic motivation. Intrinsic motivation refers to internal motivators (e.g. I practice the piano because I love music), and extrinsic motivation refers to external motivators (e.g. I practice the piano because my parents make me). Locus of control, on the other hand, is a belief that decisions and actions have a strong influence over what happens, whereas an external locus of control is the belief that one has little or no control over what happens (Stoeber, 2013). Several research studies, notable Isen and Baron's 1991 paper, have addressed the correlation between positive affect—or the ways in which people experience positive emotion—and intrinsic motivation. Their research indicated that performance of enjoyable tasks is not necessarily done at the cost of responsible work behavior on an uninteresting task that needs to be done. However, locus of control and motivation need not be isolated for this research study. These factors have more significant correlation when assessed regarding the negative health effects of stress in the workplace.

Quadrant 2: Design thinking

According to Tom Kelley and Dave Kelly (2013), Design Thinking is the “combining *empathy* for the context of a problem, *creativity* in the generation of insights and solutions, and *rationality* in analyzing and fitting various solutions to the problem context.” According to Barbara Crosby at the University of Minnesota, this is a well-developed school of thought that advocates careful consideration of context, the desired end product, and application of design principles (2014). Design is present throughout HRD, from the structure and process of organizational development to training design. Gibb's second quadrant allows for exploration of design thinking as a means to invite imagination and creativity into HRD, and also as a means to achieve

“whole person” engagement.

Design thinking is present in various fields, from elementary education to computer engineering, and it is to be understood as a continuum: At one end is informed, but mechanical, calculation and at the other is free, imaginative thinking (Lawson, 2006). A sense of aesthetics is important to design thinking, as more beautiful concepts may be realized if individuals are less self-conscious, distanced from mechanical calculation and closer to free imaginative thinking.

Design thinking in Gibb’s model captures the importation of imagination and creativity as a “Trojan horse.” It exists naturally and undetected, as when learners are asked to imagine a new concept without being given structural means of creation.

History and societal career trends seem to strongly influence design thinking, changing as technologies and resources become available. In recent history, computer programmers who can crank out code are often more valued than inventors, designers and storytellers. The influence of technology has changed expectations of contemporary workers: Distance learning and asynchronous learning is often the preferred modality of training for reasons of cost efficiency, global reach, convenience of schedules, etc. However, along with advances in technology comes a greater responsibility of the individual worker to stay competitive. It is to the individual’s advantage to be a flexible learner, not trapped in the “mechanical” end of the learning continuum.

In Daniel Pink’s book *A Whole New Mind*, Pink argues that the next generation will require a seismic shift in thinking in most of the advanced world (2005). According to Pink, businesses in this “conceptual age” need inventive, empathic, big-picture thinkers. He predicts that jobs in the future will require a more balanced “whole person” way of thinking. Learners who are comfortable thinking creatively –who are on the free

thinking end of the continuum—may be more successful in this conceptual age.

Quadrant 3: Social epistemologies of development

Epistemology is a branch of philosophy concerned with the nature and scope of knowledge, and epistemologies are theories of knowledge (Mirriam-Webster, 2004). Gibb uses Epistemologies of Development as his third quadrant, in order to address how aesthetics, imagination and creativity are learned, as well as how they influence learning. Applied epistemology may define how information is perceived, including the information interpreted using creativity, imagination and aesthetics. Framing theories of knowledge within a social setting—*social* epistemologies of development—also expands the discussion of knowledge for private ownership (possessed by an individual), compared to shared learning and learning for the benefit of the greater community.

The relationship between theories of knowledge and aesthetics is a complex issue, and I will not go into detail about what knowledge may be learned from art. However, the way people learn is at the heart of HRD, and this paper addresses the ways aesthetics influence HRD. Therefore it is important to address the general idea of learning from art.

I have suggested that HRD leans towards functionality and utility, and that aesthetics is concerned with what is beautiful. I have also stated that “good” HRD must be functional to meet its business objectives, and that beauty—which is not strategic, economic, or utilitarian—is nonetheless important for employee development. The intersection of epistemology and aesthetics supports this thesis by ensuring that the process of learning is made more robust through appreciation of art. In general, engaging with aesthetics is not just an emotional or spiritual activity; it is fundamentally

cognitive.

Aesthetic engagement allows learners to gain meaningful lessons from interactions with art. Throughout history people have claimed to learn things from art. Art changes the way people understand the world, influences personal relationships, and affects how people behave in communities. People may claim to know things about art; for example, a person may claim to know that a piece of music is good or bad, or that a drawing is well done or poorly done. Engaging with aesthetics in the environment may be emotional and spiritual, but it also informs our opinions and decisions, and is therefore *educational* (Worth, 2005). People gain knowledge from interacting with aesthetics.

Many forms of art—visual like painting or sculpture, or experiential like music or literature—may be observed and enjoyed by a single person or by a community; experiences that in turn may result in individual learning. One of the current trends in HR communities is an interest in fostering a learning community for employees. Goodyear, De Laat and Lally (2006) define a learning community as a group of people who are actively engaged in learning together, and who share common emotions, values or beliefs. Including art in the learning community, and allowing learners to gain meaningful lessons from engagement with this art, is a creative way to aid cognitive learning.

If individuals understand that they are part of a learning community, then they likely feel a sense of loyalty and membership to the organization, and this idea drives their desire to continue working and contributing to the organization. The organization fulfills their need for learning, and the individual in turn adds to the learning community. Individuals may seek to possess knowledge for private possession, to

“stockpile” information for personal gain, but this should not be perceived as anti-authoritarian, selfish or antisocial. Instead, the individual remains at the heart of HRD. Personal development exists within social, collaborative communities of practice, and learning communities enable more successful personal learning.

The 70:20:10 learning model is a widely used epistemology of leadership development. Pioneered by the Center for Creative Leadership, and based on over 30 years of research, 70:20:10 is based on the premise that leadership is learned by doing. The best kind of lessons are learned on-the-job (70%), followed by learning from others (20%), and finally from formal learning (10%) (McCall, Lombardo, Morison, 1988). Learning communities which include *actionable* learning, or on-the-job development opportunities, support more successful learning environments. Robust learning communities in environments that give, or are designed to give, pleasure through beauty, may support artistic, creative or innovative on-the-job learning activities.

Quadrant 4: Aesthetics of organization.

Gibb’s fourth quadrant is Aesthetics of Organization. Within this general heading he includes all of the values and symbols of organizational culture. These values may include beliefs, stories, motivators, and/or what the organization considers beautiful or meaningful. Gibb takes an archaeological approach to identifying and understanding an organization via its symbols, and insodoing reflects the way the organization has valued (or not valued) aesthetics.

Although learning communities are important for individual learning, interpretation of aesthetics is done on an individual level. With respect to organizational symbols and values, individuals naturally interpret organizational values and symbols

according to their own perspective and judgment. Individual interpretation of organizational aesthetics influences the knowledge economy, thereby re-defining the organization's culture.

There are numerous opportunities for applications of aesthetics in organizational culture-building. Instructional designers and training developers use various models of learning. For example, the ADDIE Model is one of the more popular frameworks of instructional systems design (Piskurich, 2006), providing ways to include aesthetic appreciation and whole person development. In the following section, I will dissect ADDIE to illustrate the ways in which creativity, innovation, and aesthetics may be incorporated for an improved learning program.

ADDIE is an iterative framework for building learning programs, using five phases (Morrison, 2010):

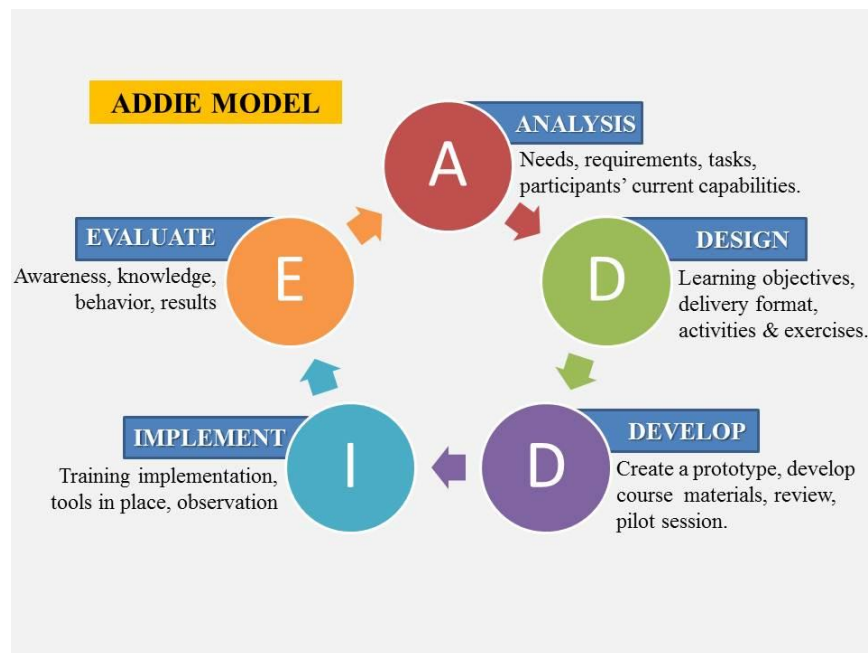


Figure 2: Addie Model. Tazim, N., 1992: Retrieved from <http://amalina2405.weebly.com/>

- **Analysis:** This phase identifies and clarifies the instructional objectives, and identifies the learning environment and learner's existing knowledge and skills. The first phase of ADDIE may be tailored to identify what, if any, aesthetic factors are present in the learning environment.
- **Design:** This is a systematic and specific phase, dealing with learning objectives, content, assessments, exercises, and lesson planning. Although this step requires specific, focused and systematic method of instructional design, aesthetics may exist naturally in the phase through “design thinking.” For example, graphic design might be used to build the learning path. Or aesthetics may be directly incorporated to the curriculum by including creative learning exercises, unique methods of content delivery, or innovative modalities of communicating with learners.
- **Development:** The development phase is the point at which content is assembled, written, drawn, printed, etc. Visual art exists naturally within this phase as developers create the learning resources: resources are designed, written, printed, assembled, etc.
- **Implementation:** This is an important phase in the learning design, as it ensures that instructors are trained and ready to successfully deliver the program. Training-the-trainer ensures that the instructor has a clear understanding of the program objectives, and knows how to implement measurable and repeatable guidance, leadership and support for learners. Although this is the step when learning applications are functioning correctly—no glitches or malfunctions—this step represents an opportunity for trainers to experience aesthetic integrations themselves, to better understand how their learners will be impacted.

- Evaluation: This phase may include a number of different formal or informal assessment methods, for the ultimate goal of providing the best possible learning programs. “Formative” methods of evaluation are helpful in that they move the focus away from achieving scores or grades, and towards positive feedback and ultimately strong learner self-efficacy (Shepard, 2005). Learners may be encouraged to participate in formative evaluations that are also creative or artistic. For example, an instructor may discover how to improve the program by asking learners to create an activity or learning program that would achieve the same outcomes. In this way, learners help design their own learning program.

The ADDIE model is only one example of many used by instructional designers, but several others could be expanded to incorporate aesthetics. Business Process Re-Engineering (BPR), Six Sigma, LEAN, AGILE, Critical Mistake Analysis (CMA), and Successive Approximation Model (SAM) are just a few approaches to training design. These models tend to focus on disciplined, data-driven processes and methodology for eliminating variability in process, and promoting knowledge-transfer to learners. Encouraging learners to use their imagination and creativity, and to appreciate beauty, cultivates whole-person learning. The learner is both intellectual and sensual, and therefore good learning design should include rigorous design and language, concepts, activities and aesthetics.

In this chapter, the various aspects of HRD were dissected to determine the ways in which concepts of art and beauty would benefit HRD outcomes. In the following section, I will discuss how this interaction may affect work engagement. Also, I will address aesthetics and the field of Occupational Health Psychology.

Chapter 6:

AESTHETICS AND ENGAGEMENT

Employee engagement has become a hot topic in recent years among practitioners, as consulting companies like McKinsey & Company, Korn Ferry International, and Hay Group have focused on helping companies attract, retain and develop engaged employees. A 2013 State of the Workplace poll done by Gallup reveals that only 30% of employees are “engaged,” and another study done by Deloitte cites that only 11% of the workforce is truly passionate about their jobs (Gallup, 2003; Deloitte, 2013).

There are various definitions of “employee engagement,” some giving more weight to the organization and some focused on the individual as driver of the engagement. The term was coined by William Kahn in 1990, who defined it as “the harnessing of organization members' selves to their work roles” (Kahn, 1990). Kahn believed that people express themselves on numerous levels as they work: physically, cognitively, and emotionally. His research inspired numerous studies exploring the connections between engagement and job satisfaction (Meyer & Allan, 1991; Schmidt, 1993; Judge, Thoresen, Bono, & Pattonet, 2001). Defining employee engagement remains problematic today, with various arguments in favor of approaches that are aimed at satisfying needs, reducing burnout, engaging technical skills, or a combination of these (Wollard & Shuck, 2011).

What’s the difference between engagement and passion? Engagement is typically measured by the extent to which an employee “buys into” the company’s mission, and

how successful that person is by the company's standards of achievement. The *passionate* worker, according to John Hagel, Co-Director of Deloitte Consulting's Center for the Edge, is a person who views challenges as opportunities to learn and grow (Sager, 2013). Hagel used the metaphor of the "passion of the explorer," and declared passion as the most essential trait needed by all organizations. Technical skills, and even engagement, will fade with time. Skills become outdated within a few years, and an individual's feelings about her manager, the company's mission, work/life balance, and other factors typically defined as "engagement" may change just as quickly. Hagel and his research team suggest that employee engagement should be redefined to include attributes of a *passionate* person.

Passionate people, according to Hagel, are the most agile. His 2013 Deloitte study *Unlocking the Passion of the Explorer* cites three attributes of a passionate person:

- **Commitment to Domain:** This attribute may be understood as the desire to have a lasting impact on a domain, industry, or practice.
- **Questing:** The questing disposition drives a person to go above and beyond his or her current responsibilities.
- **Connecting:** This attribute drives a person to collaborate with others and seek new ways to interact and share interests.

Other research has shown parallels between the personal attributes of a "life-long learner," engagement and job success. Vicki Swisher at Korn Ferry International (2012) has led research which supports a quality called Learning Agility, defined as "the ability and willingness to learn from previous experiences, and subsequently apply that learning to new and first-time situations" (Swisher, 2012, p. 1). According to Swisher Learning Agility is a leading predictor of success in a leadership role; therefore it is

advantageous for companies to hire for this trait. Both Deloitte and Korn Ferry work to identify people with inner drive for improvement, a differentiating quality that has been linked to job success.

Does this mean that companies should hire a bunch of passionate or Learning Agile employees? The Deloitte report does recommend that recruitment goals include efforts to identify passion in new candidates. However, the report emphasizes the importance of workplaces that encourage passion in employees, which in turn improves engagement. In a time when workers are increasingly skilled yet much less loyal to any particular organization, work environments supporting passionate or agile people may encourage them to remain with the organization. This might entail work environments that encourage new work teams or partnerships, or a regular rotation of roles or project work. If passionate people view challenges as opportunities to learn and grow, employers would be wise to create working environments that welcome challenges and make it okay for people to make mistakes, and to subsequently learn from them.

Since Kahn coined the term employee engagement in the early 1990's, researchers and practitioners have suggested various ways to improve employee "buy in." Many HRD textbooks have suggested organization-driven solutions focused on management and HR initiatives. Rousseau (1998) argued that employee buy in and loyalty is elicited by reinforcing perceptions of organizational membership, and demonstrating organizational care and support for employees. Ng, Butts, Vandenberg, DeJoy, and Wilson (2005) found that three variables—management communication, opportunity for learning, and work schedule flexibility—had positive effects on organizational commitment (Ng, et. al., 2005). Theoretically these efforts would build employee commitment to the organization and create an environment more conducive

to HRD strategic initiatives.

However, any organization may offer similar engagement programs. Any HR director may choose to follow these simple recipes for employee engagement, by improving clarity of job expectations, communicating career advancement/improvement opportunities, improving quality of working relationships, and rewarding performance. So how are organizations meant to differentiate themselves in order to encourage engaged, passionate, and agile workers? According to Stephen Gibbs (2005), key to engagement is the look, feel, style and aesthetics of HRD. Whether through artful (design) or arts-based HRD, fostering creativity and beauty in the workplace also improves engagement (2005).

A person who exhibits Hagel's three dispositions of a passionate worker—commitment to domain, questing and connecting—is a priceless resource for any organization. It is therefore important to consider the ways in which the language, concepts and philosophy of beauty may influence a “passionate” worker. Style, design, beauty, and language may all be a part of an individual's impact on his or her industry. For example, Steve Jobs, CEO of Apple, Inc., was not a traditional artist, yet revolutionized digital technology with his drive for precision in design.

Inspiration from beauty influences the questing disposition, which drives a person to go above and beyond his or her current responsibilities. Music, for example, has the ability to elicit a number of extreme emotions. It may calm nerves to allow for better concentration, evoke emotions that energize or excite, or trigger memories that provoke their own drivers or motivators. Inspiration from aesthetics supports a person's desire to go above and beyond his or her current role. Concepts of beauty inspire people to persevere, try something new, take risks, and overcome obstacles.

Finally, the connecting attribute, which drives a person to collaborate with others, may be directly or indirectly influenced by aesthetics. Communication between people could include language or concepts of beauty, the topics discussed, and the metaphors or analogies used. Aesthetics may be directly used in the ways people interact, by doing a creative or artistic activity together. A shared interest in music, design, dance, or painting may be discovered that allows for new or deeper work relationships. Aesthetics has the potential to be both the language used to support relationships, and the actual connection between people.

Occupational Health Psychology

A study of aesthetics and work engagement would not be complete without mentioning the field of Occupational Health Psychology (OHP), which is concerned with the association between work and work environment, and well-being of employees. It includes the disciplines of health psychology, and of industrial and organizational psychology, and has ties to other applied psychologies. OHP focuses on factors in the workplace like burnout, work-life balance, diversity and inclusion, and work-related stress. It is important to consider the ways in which aesthetics in the work environment may influence a worker's physical and mental well-being, as well as work engagement (Stoever, 2013).

No matter what their role or occupation, all people can experience psychological distress or physical illness at work. People with physically-demanding jobs are not the only ones susceptible to physical illness or injury. An accountant may struggle with physical pain caused by sitting still at a desk all day, just as a construction worker may suffer from work-related physical stress. Occupational health psychologists identify

factors that modify the relationship between work and physical or psychological health, and are striving to prevent and treat such work-related problems (Stoevers, 2013).

Occupational health psychologists also address psychosomatic symptoms, which occurs when psychological stress manifests itself through physical problems. When a person is very angry, for example, his blood pressure and pulse rise. Repeated stressful experiences can lead to serious physical illness, such as hypertension and cardiovascular disease. The importance of OHP is underscored by the significant amount of time of a person's life spent at work, and the impact of stressful experiences associated with work (Stoevers, 2013).

Engagement may be the first behavior to suffer when an employee experiences psychological or physical distress. A person suffering from burnout may continue to perform his or her job adequately for a short while, but left unchecked, performance will start to decline as well. As previously stated, HRD is dominated by concepts and philosophies driven by *functionality*. Therefore a work environment causing psychological distress may suffice for a short while, but can quickly lead to dysfunction.

Gary Cooper, professor, author and OHP expert, said in a 2010 keynote speech, "We have enough science on what causes people to get ill in the workplace. . . We know the problems, what we now have to do is get the solutions" (Taris, 2010). Aesthetics inform a work environment, transforming it beyond just safe and functional, to be pleasing. Even though every individual has his or her own personal tastes and preferences, one can generally assume that a work environment should be intended to please and satisfy, rather than offend and disgust (Gibbs, 2001). Introducing the concepts of beauty in an environment allows for personal connection with that beauty, even if this interaction differs among individuals. In so doing, the changed environment

may encourage a more relaxed, genuine, honest, core connection between a person and his or her work. Insights and new, creative thinking can arise from improved health and well-being.

Occupational health psychologists implement three levels of interventions in an effort to improve the health and well-being of employees: Primary interventions, or “stressor-detected,” which are preemptive identifications of risk; secondary interventions, which are actions aimed at high-risk individuals; and tertiary interventions, which happen when people are already experiencing psychological or physical problems (Stoeber, 2013). Aesthetics should be included as early as possible in any OCP intervention to address risk factors well before employees experience problems. For example, instead of requiring that all employees sit through a stress-management lecture from HR, invite employees to *experience* a stress-reducing artistic process of their choosing, like listening to music or drawing.

Aesthetics also seem to be the most enjoyable medium for combating barriers of engagement. Employee cynicism, for example, is a potential problem in all jobs, whether the worker is a banker or a ditch-digger. If a worker has distrust or contempt for his manager, he is likely to show disengagement at work. Textbook ways to fight employee cynicism are to ask for feedback, share information, or empower employees by including them in decision-making processes. These approaches may be good for temporary engagement and improved productivity, but once again, they fall short of whole-person engagement and well-being. Engaging a person’s appreciation for nature and for beauty, especially through art, is a pleasurable and holistic way to remove engagement barriers.

Chapter 7:

CONCLUSION

Summary

This thesis makes a “business case for the beautiful” via analysis and discussion of research that supports attention to aesthetics in human resource development. It articulates the ways in which HR might achieve greater success through engagement and development programs designed to support employees’ appreciation of aesthetics – or pleasure through physical perceptions of beauty. By expanding their mission to include artistic appreciation, HRD practitioners may be able to build environments supporting employees’ contemporary expectations, nurturing the “whole person,” improving the relationship between employee and employer, and thereby improving people’s engagement in their work.

The paper defines and explains traditional HRD as a primarily utilitarian and functional field, concerned with making things work well, as quickly as possible, using the least amount of resources. In job training or development programs, this often means instructor led, one-way learning transfer, in which learners have little control over their experience.

Bringing aesthetics into HRD allows for an enriched conversation about the work environment, beyond the functional requirements of safety and productivity. It asks HR practitioners to consider that which has been a primarily utilitarian and functional part of our lives through new ideas, concepts and practices. I have argued that the best HRD possible includes a personal element of imagination and creativity, and artistic appreciation.

I used Stephen Gibb's grid which organized applications of HRD, and captured the functional requirements of HRD as well as the incorporation of imagination and creativity. The framework allowed for various conceptions of HRD and aesthetics in four general areas: Design in HRD (aesthetics in metaphors); design thinking; epistemologies of development; and aesthetics of organization.

Finally, I discussed the ways in which aesthetics may be incorporated into HRD for improved employee engagement. The field of Occupational Health Psychology, which addresses the association between work and work environment, and well-being of employees, suggests ways in which aesthetics may improve well-being and engagement.

Analysis and Discussion:

Qualifications. Appreciation of beauty is subjective, depending on the perceiver's mood, preferences or taste, understanding or expertise, and language or culture. It is also situational, changing with the time of day or season, and with the environment, because it is influenced by everything from lighting to accessibility. Many of the arguments I have made in this research paper could be countered based on the inherent subjectivity of the perceiver's impression of the aesthetic influence. It is important to discuss these shortcomings to my study, as well as qualifications to my claims.

Aesthetic influence is not ubiquitously important. I have argued for a broad application of aesthetics in work environments; however, not all workers would benefit from the inclusion of art and beauty in their work environment—for example, when visual art distracts from productivity or compromises safety.

Aesthetic perception is also influenced by culture, gender, class and

socioeconomic status. As corporations become more global, and workers increasingly move between countries for work, cultural differences in perceptions of beauty become more distinct. What is considered beautiful by a European might be very different from that of a South Asian person. Male and female, young and old, rich and poor, gay or straight—each group holds its own truths about beauty. Such differences may compromise the general assumption that all aesthetics are pleasant.

Aesthetic incorporation into work environments has practical implications. As previously argued, appreciation of beauty improves work engagement. However, changing HRD processes already in place may be costly. Changing training and development programs takes time, energy, and money. Management and HR leaders may need help understanding and buying into the importance of aesthetics in the work environment. Sponsors and stakeholders each have their own preferences for art, so their tastes might drive the direction, application or quality of the initiative.

Throughout this study, I have provided examples of what aesthetics at work might look like—how aesthetics could be included in the workplace, and how development programs could change to accommodate aesthetics. These suggestions are my own, and should be qualified as suggestions made from my experience as an HR practitioner and researcher.

Unfortunately, well intentioned initiatives can sometimes backfire. When invited to appreciate beauty in their work environment, some previously content workers may realize that they are not so content after all. In this sense, there is “danger” to bringing imaginative, creative thinking in the workplace. Inviting imagination into the adult learning process encourages learners to use creativity to make connections, apply deductive reasoning, and question previously accepted truths. In so doing, people may

ask fundamental questions about their job, team, manager, or organization. This could potentially cause confusion and dissatisfaction in areas that were previously streamlined.

Key Research. Despite these qualifications, the research presented in this study has shown that creative and imaginative thinking, and the inclusion of aesthetics in learning and development, actually improves functionality and effectiveness of HRD. Stephen Gibb's experiential research on contemporary human resources was integral to my study on how aesthetics may live in HRD. His quadrant was an effective framework upon which to explore the ways that these separate fields might combine. Gibb's 2005 article *Aesthetics and Human Resource Development: Connections, Concepts and Opportunities* was key to understanding how an organization values (or does not value) aesthetics, and how this affects engagement. Both 2004 and 2005 papers were helpful in answering my research question: In what ways do aesthetics legitimize the concern with imagination and creativity in HRD for whole-person engagement?

In their book *Teaching and Learning Outside the Box*, Kieran Egan, Maureen Stout and Keiichi Takaya invited me to challenge what I previously assumed about the role of imagination in the classroom—that imagination and emotion can derail curriculum structure, goals, and assessments. Egan's well established theory on the role of imagination in education provided an overview of the concept of imagination, its history and diverse language, and its central value for education. His co-authors presented solid arguments that educational success is more likely when students' imaginations and emotions are a part of the learning experience. Maureen Stout's writing on critical thinking, imagination and new knowledge in education research was

especially valuable for my paper, in that she argued that critical thinking and imagination are mutually supportive capacities.

This study drew from a number of HRD and OD academic publications, including Harrison and Kessels' book, *Human Resources Development in a Knowledge Economy* (2004). They offered insightful reflections on the history of HRD, helping me to reflect on past and current practices in the field, to imagine new areas of improvement. The first part of Harrison and Kessel's book *The Emerging Knowledge Economy* was key in informing arguments about practical field applications to developing an improved knowledge economy.

Inspiration, Applications and Implications. My experience as an HRD practitioner and researcher, and also as an artist, inspired the critical questions driving this thesis. As a musician and lover of fine arts, I enjoy making music and experiencing artistic performances. As a trainer and professional in the field of leadership and talent development, I am passionate about people: how they learn, grow, and succeed in their jobs. The interaction and interplay of these areas in my personal and professional life was the inspiration for my thesis. The research supporting my paper enhanced my personal understanding of each area, and allowed for deeper appreciation of their interdisciplinarity.

In the prologue of this paper, I reflected upon one of my early experiences in a job. Everything in that work environment—temperature, atmosphere, decor—was *bland*. Even my colleagues refrained from decorating their desks, beyond a few photos or a green plant. Back in that beige cubicle, I experienced discomfort as I was forced to sterilize my work environment of things I considered pleasing. I observed that

functionality of work processes without artful or art-inspired learning has become the norm, but feels unnatural and strange. In this role, and in others since, I formed an opinion that environments without aesthetics are actually *less* functional than environments including aesthetics. The stark absence of personality in that space spoke to the true nature of the psychological, implied contract between me and my employer: I did not feel that the company cared about my unique personality, and so I did not bring anything personal to work.

It was also a difficult environment in which to learn. I wanted to be developed in my job and at the company, but the organization did not offer any formal training and development programs (besides what was included in the orientation process.) I felt that my employer had violated the implied agreement we had made when I accepted the position. I thought that I was hired because of everything I brought to the job—my leadership, flexibility, communication skills, sensitivity, work ethic, creativity, etc.—in addition to my technical skills. The impact of the psychological contract violations made me distrust the organization, unsatisfied with my work, and disengaged.

My experiences in that environment led me to question how my engagement might have improved had this organization invested in me as a dynamic and creative person. Would my contributions to that company have increased had they nurtured my ability to use imagination and creativity? In what ways could that company have improved my engagement in my job by making simple changes to the work environment, or relaxing the “rules” on how we might personalize work spaces? Would it be possible to improve engagement through art-inspired training and development?

Many of the research publications cited in this paper have answered these questions and supported my opinions, especially reflecting back to my previous

employer. Kamoche's 1998 article about knowledge economies applied to this company's stock of internal knowledge, abilities and skills, and how they were truly limited to only their employee's technical skills. The academic articles citing effects of environmental surroundings on mood and perception validated my experience feeling uninspired by my environment.

I have stated that Egan, Stout and Takaya's imagination-based approach to learning is important in the way people learn at work because it encourages people to make their own connections between ideas. My previous job allowed for very little imagination-based learning, but the organization could have encouraged this through creative instructional processes (Egan, et. al, 2007, p. 21). This research illuminates my experience in this company in two ways: imagination-based learning would have improved the HRD programs, and development programs could have been the tool with which to encourage more imaginative learning.

However, it would not have been enough to simply encourage imagination or creativity for the limited goal of improving functional skills and work efficiency. This way of leveraging a free method of thinking to achieve basic knowledge-transfer would seem superficial, and return to the same rigid view that regards workers as passive and mechanical. In his chapter entitled *Imagination in the Context of Modern Educational Thought*, Keiichi Takaya defines imagination as *flexibility* of the mind (Egan, et. al, 2007, p. 23). Imagination, therefore, is not simply a method of instruction. Instead, imagination should be used throughout the entire learning process, stimulating learning design and teaching methods, as well as the learner's experience.

The implications of this research go beyond informing my personal experience in my previous job, and for that particular company. Organizations around the globe are

recognizing the need to hire and develop people with “right-brain” qualities, including empathy, inventiveness, creativity and innovation (Pink, 2005). Traditional HRD programs may have been successful for previous generations of workers--those whose expectations of their employers were a basic exchange of work for a paycheck. But today’s employees have drastically different expectations. They work around the clock, blending personal and professional lives into every minute of their day. This dissolving of boundaries means that organizations are at greater risk of losing talented people who are not engaged at a personal level. HRD must do more to connect to the whole person at work, and the inclusion of aesthetics in HRD is the answer.

EPILOGUE

My experiences working with Human Resources have dramatically improved since those first days in my beige cubicle. A younger generation of job candidates, globalization, improved technology, economic development, and many other factors has forced HRD to respond.

Political and social interest in environmental sustainability, for example, has shaped the modalities with which training is delivered, leading to innovations in engaging, creative distance-learning. Social media has led to employees demand for clear career development paths, as well as transparency around executives' salaries. "Onboarding" programs are becoming more holistic and robust, as corporations invest the necessary time and resources to ensure that new hires feel fully supported, valued and integrated into the organization. There are constant innovations around training and development: media is mixed/combined and new technologies are used to support blended learning; adult learning "best practices" like student-centered, collaborative learning are becoming assimilated throughout training programs; fine arts are being used in both method of instruction and method of learning.

In my current role with a Training and Development team, we work to design and facilitate creative, engaging, relevant and personalized training programs. Care is taken to ensure that each learner feels that he or she is a partner in the learning process, and is recognized for his or her unique value-adding contributions. I am also fortunate to work for a leadership development consulting firm that has a mission to develop great leaders. Recent revisions to our tools and solutions have circled around the idea of a whole-person alignment to achieve truly powerful business outcomes. Instead of

searching for people who have certain skills and behaviors for a particular role (traditional competency-based), our new approach is truly comprehensive. It values not only *what you do* (competencies and experiences) but also *who you are* (tendencies and motivators). It is exciting to see that research is supporting, and organizations are investing in, whole-person development.

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